

UDYLLS

74

GRETTO

W. S. F. W. L.







*Only one hundred autographed numbered and specially bound copies of "Idylls of the Ghetto" have been issued for subscribers of which this is Number 55*

*Other Works by S. A. De Witt*

RIDING THE STORM

IRON MONGER



Acknowledgment and thanks is given to "Contemporary Verse" for permission to reprint "A Sonnet to Minor Poets" and to our own "Chatterbox" of *The New Leader* for most of the following poems—where they have appeared from week to week for the last three years.



U. S. Copyright 1927, by S. A. de Witt.

# IDYLLS OF THE GHETTO AND OTHER POEMS

by

S. A. DE WITT



RAND BOOK STORE  
New York City — 1927.

To the ever living memory of  
EUGENE VICTOR DEBS  
— A Lover of Mankind. . . .



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
Introduction by Joseph T. Shipley - - - - -	10
Dedication - - - - -	14

## IDYLLS OF THE GHETTO

Part I - - - - -	17
Part II - - - - -	19
Part III - - - - -	21
Part IV - - - - -	24
Little Italy - - - - -	26
Ghetto Snow - - - - -	26
To a Sunbeam - - - - -	27

## POET IN AN EAST SIDE HEBREW SCHOOL

Astronomy - - - - -	28
Study Period - - - - -	29
Alphabet - - - - -	30
Nature Study - - - - -	30
Geography - - - - -	31
High Holy Days - - - - -	31

## SONNETS

Two Sonnets to my Wife - - - - -	35
More Sonnets to a Dark Lady:	
No. I to XVII - - - - -	36-44
Polygamy - - - - -	45
Death - - - - -	45
Sonnet for Minor Poets - - - - -	46

# CONTENTS (*Continued*)

PAGE

Sonnets of Despair :

No. I to No. V - - - - - 47-49

## FOR MY SONS

Early Spring Song	- - - - -	53
Two Weavers	- - - - -	54
Tool Merchant Sings a Spring Song	- - - - -	57
Classing the Jazzics	- - - - -	57
November	- - - - -	58
Trade Song	- - - - -	59
The Magician	- - - - -	60
The Poet	- - - - -	60
The Banker	- - - - -	61
Rain	- - - - -	61
Prologue for a New Illiad	- - - - -	62
Here	- - - - -	63
Poet and Broker	- - - - -	64
Inheritance	- - - - -	65

## QUATRAINS AND COUPLETS

For a Bank Cashier	- - - - -	69
To Most Wives	- - - - -	70
Philosophy	- - - - -	70
A Newly Plowed Field	- - - - -	71
Quatrain	- - - - -	71
To a March Wind	- - - - -	72
Originality	- - - - -	72
Couplets over an Alabama Lynching Bee	- - - - -	73

# CONTENTS (*Continued*)

	WORDS	FOR	MUSIC	PAGE
Winter Song	-	-	-	77
Rain Song	-	-	-	77
That Night	-	-	-	78
Poet Love	-	-	-	78
April	-	-	-	79
Dead Love	-	-	-	79
Love Questions	-	-	-	80
Old Flame	-	-	-	80
To a Circe	-	-	-	81
Sea Moon	-	-	-	81
In Camelot	-	-	-	82
Romanza	-	-	-	83
Flute Song	-	-	-	83
Caprice	-	-	-	84
Tempest	-	-	-	85
Orientale	-	-	-	85
Summer Song	-	-	-	86
Dawn on the Rialto	-	-	-	87
Hunky Meets a Man	-	-	-	88

*FINIS*

## INTRODUCTION

THESE is first a distinction to be driven away, between propaganda and art. Art is more subtle propaganda. Time alone, save at the extremes, sets them apart. As with the top and the bottom of a staff, as with good and evil, one may distinguish between the spirit behind an advertisement and that which animates a lyric; but whose judgment through the years shall assort and assign "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "Oliver Twist," and "Pilgrim's Progress," Tolstoi, Galsworthy, and Shaw? All art is propaganda in behalf of the artist; for all art is the presentation of a personality, and that which we adjudge successful holds us because the ideals and characteristics of the artist have won us through his work. It has long been maintained, by those who have objected to Plato's banishing the poet from his utopia, that art will uplift the world; art is by such persons, clearly, accepted as propaganda for what they deem best. Consciously or unconsciously, the standards of the artist condition his work; so that those who enjoy his product are likely to approve, to absorb, his ideas. Politics in ancient Greece (and Restoration England, to mention but two eras) woke ringing echoes in the writings of the times; social conditions have more than once been improved as a result of such pictures of their evil as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Charles Dickens offered. Shelley indicates the more indirect influence of art for good: the proper appreciation of art calls for and develops sensitivity of spirit, delicacy of intuition, sympathetic grasp; a man in whom these qualities expand will prove the better human. No one that thinks about art today can ignore its social aspect, its impulsion to-

ward the ideals of the artist, its propaganda for the artist's personality and beliefs.

The poetry of Sam de Witt is propaganda for a curiously compounded personality. Bred in a slum section of New York City, yet risen from that environment, he breaks the gloom of a social cynicism with a rift of individual hope. Encircled, as the imaginative must be, by the multiform and many-colored visions of a world within himself, he walks the ways of the cities of the mind, singing the joy he finds there. But ever his song, welling from this world of the imagination, from this personal in-dwelling, soars over the barriers of thought on the winds of feeling, to play across the actual world, a world deaf, perhaps, to such music as he brings—

But even if I speak to ears of stone,  
My song will thunder, though I sing alone—

yet a world wherein there are not only pain and evil and cruelty, but moments of love and fragrant glimpse of beauty. Often, indeed, does this real world of injustice and ugliness and force bring down its bludgeon upon a personal dreaming; the poet's most individual lyric expression — "More Sonnets To a Dark Lady"—moves through a sombre ecstasy to the final consolation of its lonely dream. But more often it is the imagination that flows out upon and colors life, that sees in the casual, in even the sordid, the glow of a dream, the pollen of a glory.

#### A NEWLY PLOWED FIELD

Stand in reverence before this rough soil,  
Without tradition's dung of great deed;  
No magic but the hard touch of toil,  
No spell but scattered seed. . . .

Such an attitude as De Witt's sees in art not merely an escape, but an adventure. Perhaps it is the greatest of human adventures, this daring to look squarely at life, this challenge of life's ugliness that moulds it into beauty, this denial of cruelty by its assertion as art. For with the sincere acceptance of art, evil dies. Meanwhile, the artist does not flinch from the presentation of life as it is; his ability to see truly and to feel deeply determines both his social vision and his art. In his emotional grasp of the brotherhood of mankind, Sam de Witt is not stirred to his acceptance by an intellectually conceived philosophy; his "Ghetto Idylls" are haunted personal memories that make them the most vivid and moving of his verses; he has walked the streets with the gangster, felt his arm sting with the muscles of "Kid Twist;" he has played in his youth beside the future prostitute, both eager, both equally open to the forces of the world. It is as natural to him as the hardness of the city pavement, to recognize that "the Golden Rule is still the rule of gold; the meek have not inherited the earth." It is no effort of distant recollection for him to talk to the criminal, to walk under the El on Allen Street with a consumptive dreamer, himself spitting into the dirty gutter to see if there is blood. It is no effort for him to revive these scenes of the slums, for they are narrowed into the bones of the poet today; he pulses with blood of his childhood's beating.

Recognizing that New York's East Side has scorched him beyond all healing, Sam de Witt is perhaps unaware of all the aspects of its lingering. Love, in the slums, is too often pressed into a coin; one face of it the strident barter of lust; the other, the florid figure of Romance. To the hardened child of the ghetto, true feeling is "mush," is feminine; he smirches it with his noisy scorn. The shown



sentimentality of the movies, the hinted obscenity of the tabloids, are real to the slums. Out of this atmosphere is likely to rise a mist of self-consciousness before kindness, delicacy, tender-love — before the nobler emotions. The sensitive being who has sprung from coarse surroundings has often, in his emotional life, a fear of seeming sentimental; and Sam de Witt wears a cloak of cynical indifference, of strong “gangliness,” over the bared heart of his tender concern. Fortunately, it is a garment that life has torn, and through the tatters of this early hardness gleam the fires of love that burn indignantly at human wrong, that glow brightly in human fellowship, that soar serenely in the human hope of art.

JOSEPH T. SHIPLEY.

New York, March 26, 1927.

## DEDICATION

*Because my dreams will always live in me,  
I never will grow old enough to die  
Within the vision of a world set free . . . . .  
I never will grow tired enough to sigh*

*That while we are such fools, it were not worth  
The stint of sacrifice, the pinch of trial,  
The anguished laboring before the birth. . . .  
I will not rest and slothfully beguile*

*An empty moment with a cynic phrase,  
That all is useless; that the glut of sense  
And self, is all sufficient to these days  
Of dead ideals and low experience.*

*But even if I speak to ears of stone,  
My song will thunder, though I sing alone.*



IDYLLS OF THE GHETTO



## GHETTO IDYLL

### I.

#### *To The Profane Memory of Kid Twist.*

The streets still lie,  
As they have lain since I  
First took my root in one.

Constrictors cut of stone  
Coil round in loops,  
Doors and walls and stoops,  
Each tenement compressed  
Against the other, back to breast ;

Windows, eyes too torture-blind to see,  
Glint a shrill eloquence of agony.

The streets still lie like boas hewn in stone,  
As they have lain,  
Since I took root in one.

---

If there be any change, Kid Twist,  
Then you might tell . . . .  
If there are words in hell  
And bullet-splintered breath  
Can twang clear speech  
From the stiff strings of death . . . .

Suppose we meet  
Tonight again on Ludlow Street,  
At the same corner where you gripped my arm,  
And twisted it in glee at my alarm  
And pain, while all the time you hissed  
"Wot's me name?" until I shrieked  
"Kid Twist!"

At the same corner where with broomstick bat  
And tip, we toyed at "pussy-cat,"  
The while we poked and bantered vulgar names—  
Until you left me for your grimmer games.

You knew it all so well;  
These cluttering carts, the smell  
Of mingling wares and sweat  
On summer nights;  
The scattering lights,  
The hawking cries,  
The lurk in hawkish eyes,  
The shuffling swish of feet  
Upon the walk—the crunching street;

The stores, all primped and curled  
Vending gay favors to a sad world,

Like the dolled ladies, Kid,  
Who brought you gold. . . .

I wondered then,  
Not knowing what they sold.

---

Out of hell  
You might perk up and tell  
How all your scenes  
Of death and shame  
Are still the same. . . .

The carts still pay their pence of peace  
To your successors, with the due increase  
The age demands; the “gat”  
Still spits command as yours once spat;

And there are ladies. Need I dwell  
On a too tedious tale,  
We knowing what they sell?

---

For you and me  
They have not altered much. . . .  
These walls and ways have borne  
A stout immutability  
And a low scorn  
For time’s necromantic touch.

Constrictors turned of stone  
The streets still lie  
As they have lain since I  
First took my root in one. . . .

## GHETTO IDYLL

### II.

*To Rose G. . . . .*

Grand Street is a mean,  
Cadaverously lean  
Pathway to the years  
When you were twelve,  
And I thirteen. . . . .

Then nymphs and Pans  
Danced over garbage cans.  
I know for me  
The slope down Lewis Street  
Was fairer far  
Than any vale in Thessaly. . . .  
Then love was sweet.

Rose, our love was clean;  
I do not mean  
Because we were too young for else,  
You twelve and I thirteen;

But since we knew  
The dark and grew  
To wisdom through the nights  
Of scarlet lights  
And gay kimonaed misses,  
Making winks and hisses  
To a passing gent. . . .

We smirked our knowledge  
When he went. . . .

We knew the shame;  
Nor wondered when the wagons came  
With cops to pile the ladies in,  
And clanged away a load of sin.

We grew so near the brothel door,  
We knew the orgies of the street,  
So that our love was doubly pure,  
And so our kisses doubly sweet.

---

To-day, entrapped in life  
Of motherhood and wife  
In empty drudging over  
Empty duty,  
You should transgress a while  
For memory,  
And walk again with me  
The way we paved with beauty. . . .

Grand Street is a mean  
Cadaverously lean  
Roadway to the dawn  
When you were twelve  
And I thirteen.

But then, all roads were wide,  
Each house a mountainside,  
Each roof a parapet  
Where Priam's throne was set  
That he might view  
The seas of fate that swirled  
About his tottering world  
Because of Helen,  
Who perhaps was you. . . .

And I, a Menelaus  
And Achilles, too.

You did not know,  
And I, I hardly knew  
What rich enchantment  
Lay in love; what love could do  
To turn a Ghetto slum  
Of squalid shame  
Into a tapestry of Attic gold  
And flame. . . .

You were twelve then, Rose,  
And I, thirteen,  
And life was sweet,  
And love so full and clean. . . .

But now the street  
And life and love are mean,  
And all their shapes  
Cadaverously lean. . . .

### GHETTO IDYLL III.

*To the Memory of Dr. J. . . . R. . . . in Mt. Zion Cemetery.*

Be grateful, lad, your stone is meant  
To grace no graceless tenement  
Of hall and stair  
And plastered holes  
Moaning for air.

Be thankful, then, to any god  
For your clean lodging in the sod.

No pillared L ways overhead,  
No clattering clatter of the cars,  
To hide the ballet of the stars,  
Or drown your gossip with the dead.

Now you remember  
The nightly strolls  
Of our disembodied souls  
Through the ghastliness  
Of litter, and the press  
Of hungering shapes and eyes,  
The chatter and the cries,  
And while black gutters  
Hissed and swirled,  
We walked upon another world.

The housewife jostled by with bags,  
The peddler hawked a stock of rags,  
The gangster slinked, the "cokey" leered,  
The rabbi mumbled in his beard. . . .

The lady with the wink and hum,  
And Mary, Mary the sugar bum,  
And children fluttering everywhere. . . .  
A Babel blathered in the air. . . .

But we were disembodied souls  
Drifting through them in our strolls,  
Forgetting L ways overhead,  
The chattering clatter of the cars,  
The while we counselled with the dead,  
And planned our pathways to the stars. . . .

---

What was it then, urging our feet  
To trudge to work through Allen Street?  
Was it because that horrified lane  
Held blacker torment than our pain;  
The cutting cough that wracked you so,  
The axe-like fear that hacked me so,  
For when you spat, I spat in dread,  
And turned to see if mine was red. . . . ?



Then we would hurry to our walk,  
And feveredly renew our talk,  
Of pleasant scenes in pleasant lands,  
Of trees that spread their gracious hands  
Against the philanthropic sky,  
Pleading for frail and sickly things  
That do not want to die. . . .

You dreamed of easing ills and aches,  
And mending crooked limbs and breaks,  
And giving strangled babes their breath,  
And cleansing lungs of death.

You dreamed and coughed, and dreamed again,  
A Vulcan in a shop of pain.

I dreamed of love and Greece,  
And all blind Homer told  
About those years of gold.

Our fellows, who were not above  
The game the gutter taught for love  
Would twit us on our abstinence,  
Saying we lacked the manly sense,  
And found no favor in their eyes. . . .

We kept on walking through the skies.

I dreamed a Homer born in me.  
I dreamed a Ghetto Oddessy. . . .

The L cars cackle on their way,  
Laughing at every word I say.  
The Babel blathers out of time,  
Fouling my rhythm and my rhyme. . . .  
The houses leer,  
The gutters sneer,  
The streets are tortuously long. . . .  
I cannot sing their song.

Be grateful lad, you stone is meant  
For no ugly tenement. . . .  
Give many thanks to any god  
For your lodging in the sod. . . .  
No pillared L ways over head,  
No jumbling clatter of the cars,  
To drown your counsel with the dead,  
Or hide the ballet of the stars. . . .

## GHETTO IDYLL

### IV.

#### *The Tenements.*

The hurdy gurdy rants a tune,  
The coal man grunts along;  
The peddler drones a litany  
To the rhythm of the song. . . .

The windows of the tenements  
Are bleary eyes of trolls;  
They leer above the teeming streets  
And peer their terror into souls.

The walls of tenements are blinds  
Drawn down against the skies;  
They hide the constellated joys,  
And blot the wonder from our eyes.

And nothing blooms behind the walls;  
Squalor squats a-wheedling there;  
Hunger spins a vicious cloth  
From off the spindles of Despair.

If marriages be heaven-made  
As holy agents tell,  
The matings in the tenements  
Are only conjured up from Hell.

Children are such hallowed things,  
That often have I cried,  
"If they be doomed to tenements  
Then it were better that they died. . . "

For even I who found a way  
And fled their sorcery,  
Will always wear in sullen shame  
The blight they branded on to me.

I hold a rose, or touch a star,  
Or meet my love, and sing. . . .  
There is a harshness in my song.  
The curse in on my lute and string.

I walk with beauty on the way;  
I pound a rhapsody;  
Yet there is nothing I can say  
Unless my childhood speaks for me.

Then beauty turns a puzzled ear  
On each discordant word;  
Harkens a moment, but to flee  
Like any hurt or startled bird. . . .

Whatever righteous men will build  
Into benevolent show  
To balm the canker of this shame  
Will be too torturingly slow.

If only I might live to see  
A god of holocaust  
Descend upon the tenements  
And grind their horrors into dust. . . . ?

The tenements are hieroglyphs;  
They are not sweet to read.  
They blur the lucent blue of day  
With awful narratives of greed.

The tenements are hieroglyphs  
We chiselled in our time;  
They spell the generation's sin,  
They tell a dynasty of crime.

And all the guilt for them is ours,  
And all the dread is their's.

And now the hurdy gurdy sends  
Its music mounting up the stairs.

### LITTLE ITALY

God, give them light in Mulberry Bend. . . .  
Tear down the hovels. There it is said  
The Borgias still live in a tawdry way,  
And da Vinci lies dead. . . .

God, give them music on Mulberry Bend,  
Tunes out of Naples, tunes and guitars;  
Someone has plundered the sun from the sky,  
And stolen the stars. . . .

### GHETTO-SNOW

Because I hate the roofs that blot the skies,  
Because alone I cannot tear them down;  
Because I cannot hide them from my eyes,  
I wait for snow to fall upon the town.

## TO A SUNBEAM IN THE GHETTO

Sunbeam, sunbeam  
Do you hide your store  
Of light and laughter  
Underneath my floor?

Oftendays I see you  
Steal into my room,  
Like a silver fairy  
With a silken broom,  
Dusting every cranny,  
Cleansing them of gloom.

Then you rest a little,  
Near the kitchen door,  
And then, all of a sudden  
You vanish through the floor.

I think I have your secret,  
Glistening little mite. . . . ,  
Underneath the flooring,  
You are hiding light.

Time will come, I wonder  
When the sun will die,  
And days will stumble blindly  
Through a blinded sky ;

And when the dark is deepest,  
In a hopeless night,  
I'll tear up the flooring  
And flood the world with light.

Sunbeam, sunbeam,  
Come and hide your store  
Of golden light and laughter  
Underneath my floor.

## POET IN AN EAST SIDE HEBREW SCHOOL

### *Astronomy.*

The moon is an old gray mother  
Weeping a pale sorrow  
Over the earth.

Stars are Kadisch candles. . . .  
Devout remembrances  
For those who have fallen  
Out of her faith.

Somewhere a star shines for me.

Am I not one of those who died,  
Long, long ago. . . . ?

In the beginning  
The seven pronged candelabrum  
Shone in the House of Jehovah  
Before the Holy of Holies.

The pagan came and seized it  
With unhallowed hands.

Jehovah struck him down  
And wrenched it from his grip.

The branches of the sacred symbol  
Were twisted into an alien shape.

Someday in His time  
He will restore it to the old symmetry.

Just now it shines in His window,  
And even wise men call it  
The Dipper. . . .

*Study Period.*

Night is a Talmud  
Opened for study  
In the temple of the hills.

Forests are Talmudim  
Poring over the Kaballa.  
Ghosts of mouldered mysteries  
Sidle through the moonlit spaces.

A cynic pine  
Snickers heresy  
On the bated air.

An oak shrugs under his heavy shawl,  
Strokes a scraggly beard  
And mutters remonstrance.

A birch flirts a ribbon of laughter.  
He finds a merry tale  
Under the mystic solemnities.

Debate begins.  
Benches full of Rabbonim.  
Maples, willows and elms,  
Grumble orthodoxies  
With patriarchal oaks.

Groups of lean skeptics,  
Alders and spruces,  
Shrill and sniffle  
With irreligious pines.

Sundry saplings,  
Timid Yeshiva boys  
Huddle together,  
Whisper and giggle.

Against the air,  
A rumble of argument,  
A wail, and then all voices  
Mounting into multitudinous sound.

Against the moon,  
A shaking of arms,  
A swaying of bodies,  
A Babel of inextricable motion.

Dawn is a new page turned  
In a Talmud. . . .  
Again, there is study and silence  
In the synagogue of the hills.

*Alphabet.*

The moon is an old rabbi  
Pointing a silver stylus down  
Over the shimmering page  
Of the pond.

Earnest lads,  
The reeds and birches bend  
Repeating in a murmuring drone,

Aleph Beth, bah, Aleph Gimmel, gah,  
Ah, ah, ah. . . . .

*Nature Study.*

Winter is a prayer shawl  
For the devout hills.

The willows in the vales  
Fringe the taliss  
With silken tassels  
Of frost.



*Geography.*

The world is round,  
Night here,  
Day there. . . ?

I mumble Krishma, the night prayer  
For a dreamless sleep.

The stars are phylacteries  
Upon the brow and arm  
Of old Israel,  
Now risen with the day.

Morning there,  
Night here. . . .

The world must be round.

*High Holy Days.*

Father, the trees are no longer plain,  
Each one stands like Joseph  
Wearing a cloak of colors.

Nay, son, this is no day for idle pageantry.  
Rosh Hoshonnah is on us, and on the hills.  
The New Year comes to our people with deep rejoicing;  
We dress in gay tint and in fine rainment  
And sing to forget the old year's woe.

Then, father, the forests are of the faith,  
For they are garbed in gala dress,  
In all the gorgeous colorings of joy,  
They rustle a golden laughter to the sun.

Ay, son, the trees and we are one tribe  
In old experience.  
Even as they have borne the lash  
Of pagan tempests, bent low  
In torture,  
Stifling wail and moan, only to rise  
When the fury ended,  
So have our people been, and will ever be.  
As long as there is madness in the wind  
For hills and forests,  
So long will there be madness in an unbelieving mind  
For us.  
    Their holidays are ours, and their lives  
    Soul and symbol of our own.

Then, father, shall I call them Goyim,  
And even godless Pagans.  
Who dare make so light of this High Holy Day,  
To call it Autumn?

SONNETS



## TWO SONNETS TO MY WIFE

### I.

Whatever you possessed was gold in trade  
Against my coin of instability.  
I have grown hard; the storm and I have made  
Queer mating since you linked your years to me.

I have grown bigamous; the wind has lured  
My fancy and my passion, time and time;  
I held your love a thing to be endured  
Or heard, like some inconsequential rhyme.

And you are neither wise nor fortunate  
To match your constancy against the wind.  
No stern salvation can obliterate  
The trysting hills where I have stood and sinned.  
Your warmth, your worth, your rich gentility  
Are frail against a gale-trimmed craft like me.

### II.

You are all depth in silence as in pain;  
Even your laughter tones profundity;  
I have a reed for fluting in my brain;  
Thin notes for sorrow, giddy trills for glee.

You have the glow of hearthfire in your eyes;  
Comfort and order range before your hands;  
I walk bewildered over distant skies,  
And live in fancy's dream disordered lands.

You hold a regency beyond a price  
In princely sons. Your home where kings might sit  
At regal ease, mirrors the sacrifice  
In stintless toil, with which you fashioned it,  
While I danced scherzos at the height of noon,  
And whittled shaveling couplets to the moon.

## MORE SONNETS TO A DARK LADY

### I.

Love is not tallied on a string of years  
With history, and stupid lives, and debts.  
Love tells a reckoning in throbs and tears,  
By vaulting ecstasies and low regrets.

The fragmentary touch of hand to hand  
Might run a cycle in bewildering bliss;  
And who will sum the eras that are spanned  
While timid lovers venture to a kiss. . . ?

But when you ask me sweet, "How long, how long  
Our love will hold its fragrance and its fire?"  
I answer, "By the measure of my song,  
And through the rich recurrence of desire. . . .  
When all my songs for you are done and said,  
Then will you know, that love and I are dead. . . "

### II.

Yet you must know how absence can be wise  
To one so frail as I am in a storm;  
You with the depth of thunder in your eyes,  
You with a tethered lightning in your form.

But you come pirouetting through my dreams,  
Staid dreams, good dreams, like prim reception rooms;  
Tumbling your hair in moon-combed mountain streams,  
Tossing your arms about like wind-blown plumes.

Though I have hung my house with cross and saint,  
So that no pagan thing may venture in,  
You enter, laughing down my stern complaint,  
And dance until the stolid ikons spin. . . .  
And for an hour of phantom revelry  
I am what silly reason dare not be.

### III.

There is a joy in bearing gifts to you,  
Like that of pilgrims bringing to a shrine;  
With but this sadness, that my goods are few,  
And none of them in texture overfine.

But if in giving we enhance a boon,  
Then what I bear outravishes the Ind;  
The shawls are spun and tinted by the moon,  
The silks are woven by the gypsy wind.

These coronets are pearl-encrusted fern,  
These diamonds stolen from Olympian space.  
And though I know how little you return,  
How futile would be praying for your grace,  
I am content to watch my candles burn  
Before the dream-framed image of your face.

### IV.

Finer than elfin weave will be the net  
To catch the glow in your half-lidded eyes  
When you and I and the soft night are met.  
The moon a sad duenna of the skies

Sees the swift danger, and in prudish grace  
Points a pale beam of warning on your hair,  
Only to light new glories on your face,  
And tempting treasure for my dream to snare.

If only we could play this radiant game  
Of love intangible, with gleam and glance  
And lucent song, lit only by the flame  
Of chastity upon your countenance,  
Then the eternal nights would hold our tryst,  
And every star a hill where we had kissed.

## V.

Through all my warm professions and my vows,  
You thrill and live with reverent sympathy  
More sacred than all comradeship allows.  
And when I fail them all, you do not flee.

Into the trite retreats of injured pride,  
For blasted faith and righteousness betrayed. . . .  
You find a newer need now at my side.  
No boasting mien can show me less afraid,

When what was laughter once, now jerks with pain,  
And all my songs droop into spineless sighs.  
My deeds wane mistier than towers in Spain,  
And all my burnished truths are tarnished lies.  
Yet am I loved so well, since you remain  
Amid the wreckage of my frailties.

## VI.

When I am surest that our love is strong,  
And peace is on us, and the days are fair,  
There comes a broken cadence in my song,  
No skill can hide or conjuring repair.

You hair has all its incense and your lips  
Hold all the promise of the gift you gave.  
Yet seeing how the brightest candle drips,  
And every regal thing stalks to a grave,

So droops upon my singing sense the pall  
Of an unconscionable doubt, that this  
Fond faith of ours will spring no miracle  
Beyond the magic of the last sad kiss.  
Thus comes the broken cadence in my song,  
When I am surest that our love is strong.



## VII.

Take these dull thoughts with you ; I cannot send  
Harsh words for parting, all that pique dictates. . . .  
A lover is less lasting than a friend ;  
A friend as solid as the flimsy fates.

A lover gives in one extravagance ;  
A friend metes out with calculation set.  
One spends his frenzy early in the dance.  
The other lends it through a minuet.

I would I knew a way to bear the lie  
Of friendship, since we did not venture higher.  
One might forego the drab hypocrisy  
Of feigning warmth, when he is mad with fire,  
And but to linger longer in your reach  
Barter his passion for the coin of speech.

## VIII.

You will be gone before we turn the lane,  
And all the vision of a day with you  
Will shrivel swiftly into the queer pain,  
The ache that follows what we dare not do,

When doing may have colored up a year,  
That now holds stupid doubt and blur ahead. . . .  
It might have ended with a scalding tear ;  
But then we would have learned to love instead.

Soon you will go the way of winds and ships,  
And I will stand alone upon our hill,  
Facing the wind as though it held your lips  
Through empty hours — the cups that I will fill  
With dreams once lightly banished, when you said,  
"Drink of them only when our love is dead. .."

## IX.

But you are of that permanence that gives  
A fuller presence when the flesh is gone,  
Like the deep measure of a song that lives  
Long after the cymbals and the strings are done.

These partings from your vibrant self contain  
Only a moment's qualm, a stabbing sigh,  
Like the quick shock of earth when touched with rain  
After the drouth has sapped it utterly.

So say farewell, if such it means to you,  
I cannot, since it is too sad to say,  
Though sorrow gives this hour a sainted hue,  
As twilight sanctifies the sinful day. . . .  
And be content in this, that I will find  
You at my side each morning of the mind.

## X.

I sensed no season's heat or chill when you  
Were near. There was an even warmth and glow,  
And all the moments of the day too few,  
That now are all too many and too slow.

Now cold winds have a lash with leaden tips,  
And winter's menace and my dread are real;  
The wounds you balmed so gently with your lips,  
Are open-mawed with pain, and will not heal.

And question comes, is this the bittered stuff,  
The gods prescribe for those who taste their wine?  
Ah! if it be, I have not sipped enough  
To earn this measure of their acrid brine. . . .  
Another day with you, one draught of love,  
And I would laugh at Boreas and Jove. . . .

## XI.

Like the recurrent flood at winter's end,  
My love for you brings turbulence and peace;  
And whether you are worth what I pretend  
Or not, I ask my gods for no release

From the cruel pain that gives this passion birth,  
And makes you parent to its seed of flame.  
What if this fine illusion mix with earth,  
And there be secret whisperings of shame  
Among the envious in their proper pew,  
Among the fearful in their shadowed seat. . . ?  
I will walk proudly down the aisle with you,  
And make command that they anoint your feet

With the high reverence that whelms in me  
When I am countered by your chastity.

## XII.

The armor years have buckled to my brain,  
Had borne stout blows and winced with fortune's stress,  
Impenetrable to the steel of pain,  
Until you speared me with your wantonness.

I walked secure before the walls of Troy,  
The battle broiled; I neither saw nor heard;  
I sought my Helen like a glamored boy,  
And triumphed, till you stunned me with a word.

How shall I fall then? Like the blasted limb  
Of an oak stricken in tempestuous wrath?  
I who slew the gods to please your whim,  
And tore Olympus down to ease your path?  
And dying shriek my hate? Or else in calm  
Accept your lips again for dubious balm. . . ?

### XIII.

Something within you, sings a song to me,  
And I am halted in my aimful stride.  
Something within me hears your melody  
Too full of artless depth to be denied.

I tremble on the edge of an abyss  
Between decision and a wanton whim. . . .  
Your music has the cadence of a kiss  
And all the soothing rhythm of a hymn.

I know not what to choose, no more than one  
Who gazes on an autumn sky can hold  
Preferment for a color that the sun  
Pours out in spectrum on a ground of gold.  
And so I merely sip the strains you sing,  
And dream that I alone am listening.

### XIV.

There will be laughter when our love is dead,  
Not the light bubbling such as children make,  
But the cold shrieking when the heart has bled,  
Quite hard and dry, and is about to break.

Do not show laughter now, your voice still rings,  
With a dim cloistered glory in my ears;  
About your face a sainted aura clings,  
And I can see your eyes still blessed with tears.

Since it is never late for love to die,  
Then let it pulse a while before we slay. . . .  
A few more kisses, and another sigh;  
Then you can fling your continence away.  
And I might also learn, and you agree  
That all the grief, is in our vanity. . . .

## XV.

I dreamed that there might come before the end  
Of an experience with ordained years,  
Some one godlier than the common blend  
Of passionate limbs and whims and ready tears;

Surely more permanent than flossy skin,  
And glancing lures and lips of doubled charm,  
That hardly last the hour in which we sin,  
And drably end in anguish and alarm.

But ah! you never came, rich as you are,  
And all sufficient as you seem to be. . . .  
I view your presence like a nearing star,  
I touch your hand with fearful piety,  
Mumbling the futile hope to keep above  
The sad and base monotony of love. . . .

## XVI.

"There is no permanence," you sagely said;  
"Why mummy every kiss and fervored vow  
With the balmed tape of faith? This love once dead  
Will shrink into a grisly shape, while now

"It pulses quickly, radiates and springs  
Like a young beast prime passionate for the stud.  
This is the way of all terrestrial things;  
This is the ordained manner of the blood.

"And why make votive nonsense over flesh,  
When it be meant for open gluttony . . . .  
Then gorge and revel while the game is fresh. . . ."  
All this and more you sagely said to me.  
But when love died, I fled the proffered feast,  
To find a permanence in pain, at least.

## XVII.

If I were less the man, I might have kept  
A show of worship at your trammelled shrine,  
Or in a swinish incarnation crept  
To snout your crumbs and lap the dripping wine.

But being more the man, and more the fool,  
I fashion outrage for your simple sins,  
And mouth it frothing with fanatic drool.  
Now all your smiles are like gargoylian grins,

And lurking madness frames a silhouette  
Against my wall of thought. Your fragrant form  
Contorts into a monstrous thing, and yet,  
My reason rides its anchor through the storm.  
However passion fume, and fog and blur,  
I still can see the light I dreamed you were.

## POLYGAMY

Three maids I woo at once in pagan greed;  
One timid as a zephyr in the dawn;  
One gracious and as supple as a reed;  
The third a daughter of the leprecaun.

Three lives I live, and each in fitting zest.  
Since one brings peace and one a lucent glow,  
And when I weary of their warmth and rest,  
I still have her of the bewildering toe.  
And thus I fill my days, quite hurriedly  
As one will do who lives so many lives,  
With rendezvous and tryst. And one should be  
So careful not to tangle days and wives.  
And surely I would be so careful, too,  
Did I not know how all my maids, are you. . . .

## DEATH

All this came in a curious dream to me:  
One night we met each other on the road  
Quite unacquainted; and so pleasantly  
You asked the way, and eagerly I showed

The distance ending at a tavern's light.  
You stood in doubt, and so I offered you  
My singing self against the brooding night.  
And we were wending on before we knew.

Then as we reached the inn, we were agreed.  
But when we entered in the bridal room,  
I felt the darkness of a gruesome deed,  
And the cold portent of a formless doom.  
And when I lit the lamp and saw your face,  
I fled the dead leaves in a frenzied race.



## SONNET FOR MINOR POETS

Because your music did not startle suns  
Out of their toughened orbits, you retire  
To lowly plains, like huddled myrmidons  
About the glow of ordinary fire.

And for a low consoling you attune  
Your torpid instruments to bandied themes;  
Re-echo all the couplets to the moon,  
And thrum old patterns out of ancient dreams.

Companionable plaudits stir again  
Your drugged divinities; a wrenching throb  
Stings the soft surface to symphonic pain,  
Swiftly to fade into a beaten sob. . . .

If only you would go your separate ways  
Singing to stolid suns, instead of praise. . . ?



## SONNETS OF DESPAIR

### I.

A saintly halo holds a sickly light  
Against the splendor of a single star,  
And I will learn to hold no holy sight  
More sacred than the godless beasts we are.

And this I choose for all the consequence,  
And that which will be lost remain my loss.  
For what would be if stripped of all pretense  
My flesh be hardly fit to grace a cross.

There is more virtue to the higher mind  
In this low dance for ease and ruthless gain,  
Or in the slaughter of the weaker kind,  
Or in the strangling of the slower brain,  
Than all the thousand Christs have left behind  
Upon their thousand Calvaries of pain. . . .

### II.

I live in stratumed surfaces; I stand  
A hill of stone upon a windy lea,  
Unarmed against the years that batter me  
And pound my sides of granite into sand.

And is there nothing loose within, no fire,  
No simmering madness lidded down in pits  
Biding a day to blast me into bits;  
Nothing but dull content and cold desire. . . ?

So Jahveh lets me moulder down in vain,  
Another dust heap in His useless schemes,  
Although I know there is a golden vein  
That seeks for light along the inner seams;  
Enough to build great palaces in Spain  
And fill them with fulfillment of fine dreams. . .

### III.

I have stored too many useless things  
You say ; my attic is a cheerless place,  
With broken mechanisms, gears and springs,  
And shafts and pulleys trimmed with spider lace.

And scattered records of my cancelled debts,  
And shameful entries of the ones I fled,  
Paying for kindnesses with suave regrets,  
When harsh confession would have comforted.

All these and more of a disjointed past,  
Are heaped and strewn around in autumn rout.  
But what is one to do? . . . The sand runs fast. . .  
And still if I could twist the glass about  
And sift Time back, I would return it seems  
Only to potter with my broken dreams. . . .

### IV.

It is no hate that stirs my tongue to this,  
Nor yet despair that weighs the bearer down,  
But just this truth, that what was always, is ;  
A tent of fools has grown into a town.

The weak are still the weak, the strong still bold,  
The poor are thin, the strong are wide in girth ;  
The Golden Rule in still the rule of gold ;  
The meek have not inherited the earth.

Above is revelry, below the moans,  
In London town, New York or Babylon,  
The slaves who sweated over Pharoah's stones,  
Heap pyramids of steel against the sun.  
The hosts who fattened Flanders with their bones,  
Once marched with Xerxes and Napoleon.

V.

My soul is not the blacksmith shop it was ;  
The forge is cold, the bellows bag is torn ;  
In the dark, stillness throbs more clamorous  
Than angered hammers on the anvil horn.

The quiet and the ruin I have made,  
Where once I shaped rebellion in the flame,  
And song to stir and thunder to upbraid,  
Arraign and jeer and spew me into shame,

But I have chosen with a wearied heart  
Between these torments, and the thorny fame  
For shoeing beasts and mending every cart  
And welding every broken thing that came. . .  
I find I cannot touch the slimmest part  
Of what is shattered, and of what goes lame.



FOR MY SONS  
DAVID *and* EUGENE



## EARLY SPRING SONG

A hill, a meadow  
And a tree in June  
Are far too full of beauty  
For a tune.

A wood in autumn  
Splashed in multi-tone  
Is far too deep in music  
All its own.

A hill in winter  
Or a frosted tree  
Shrills out an old discordant  
Rhapsody.

If I could write the songs  
For winds to sing,  
I'd fashion every one of them  
For Spring.

For she alone comes blind  
With birth, and mute,  
Too frail to touch a timbrel  
Or a lute.

## TWO WEAVERS

In Kurdistan  
A weaver man  
Sits at an olden loom  
And threads and weaves  
Patterns of roses,  
Magical leaves.

Some day  
A silk bearded merchant  
With tongue of floss  
Will buy the carpet  
And ride it away.

There will be no loss  
Though the loom become empty.

The weaver is old,  
And will have need  
Of the pieces of gold.

---

A weaver sits in autumn time  
In a great green room  
By an old loom.

He, too,  
Is threading a rug  
On a ground of blue.

His hands pull strands  
Now up, now down,  
Laughing red  
Brooding brown,



Glinting yellow,  
Purpled strains,  
Mingling with scarlet  
And russet stains,

Patterns radiant,  
Patterns dull,  
As shapeless as God,  
As beautiful.

Some night by moon,  
Some day by sun,  
The weaver will rest,  
His carpet done.

---

Then out from the North,  
The harrying North,  
Barbarian hordes  
Will sally forth. . . .

On numberless camels  
Grey and white,  
They will ride by day,  
Nor rest at night.

A ghastly and a glittering host,  
With pennons of silver  
And pikes of frost.

The wind will fife,  
The wind will drum;  
But the weaver knows  
That never they come  
To trade or buy;

They are no ilk  
Of fine fingered men  
With tongues of silk. . . .

Their manners are raw  
And harsh and cold,  
Nor do they jingle  
Pieces of gold.

---

Comes the day  
When the rug is taken,  
Carried away,  
Hidden or sold,  
Or utterly lost.

And who will question  
The spears of the frost?

Yet the weaver must know  
How his carpets go. . . .

He smiles in calm  
On camel and thief,  
With never a grumble  
Or word of grief.

It is said he is rich,  
And wise and old;  
And owns many looms,  
And mountains of gold. . . .

## TOOL MERCHANT SINGS A SPRING SONG

Take away my merchandise,  
Clear these laden walls,  
That I may show a line of dreams,  
And rhymes and madrigals.

Fill my shelves with bubbling tunes,  
Old ode and villanelle;  
A fig for all your heavy sums,  
And what you buy and sell.

Free my shelves of weighty wares,  
My scales that measure drams;  
And fill them up with April songs,  
And idle epigrams. . . .

## CLASSING THE JAZZICS

*It Ain't Gonna Rain No More*

Ah, it is told by older wiser men,  
It will not rain again.  
The clouds have done their little stint of grief,  
Over the grave  
Of the last dead leaf.

It will not rain again?  
How can old, or any age of men,  
Versed only in light life and pain,  
Know the soft magic  
Of a little rain. . . ?

## NOVEMBER

God spreads a prayer rug on the hills,  
For the high holy days  
Of the faithful.

There is a loom of wonder in his house  
Behind the stars.

God spreads the rug,  
But only the infidel wind  
And the pagan rain  
Make sport upon it.

Sometimes the wind grips it at the end  
And shakes it into undulating motion.  
Sometimes he dances over it  
With the light toe  
And the fierce spin  
Of a bacchante.  
When the rain comes pelting,  
He howls in glee and scampers around,  
Making blasphemous signs at the God  
Who laid a prayer rug on the hills  
For His faithful.

But a day comes  
When the slow wrath of Him  
Who wove beauty on the loom behind the stars,  
Grows to white anger at the desecrations;  
The white anger,  
That we, and the wind and the rain, call  
Winter. . . . !

## TRADE SONG

So many ships I send to sea,  
But none of them comes back to me.

While all the ships of other men,  
Sail out, but they sail in again.

I sent a galleon to Cathay,  
With trinkets in a roundelay,

To trade them for Alladin's ring. . . .  
My ship must still be wandering.

So many more with dreams, I manned,  
For Camelot, Broceliande,

Altruria and Romany,  
And all the kingdoms dear to me. . . .

While all the ships of other men,  
Sail out but they sail in again,

My ships have all gone out to sea,  
But never one comes back to me. . . .

## THE MAGICIAN

Strange things  
The wind can do  
To marvel at. . . .  
Gives magic toes  
To old, old leaves,  
Or turns into  
The tipsy knave  
Who steals my hat.

## THE POET

On a meadow I would lie,  
Printing poems on the sky,  
While a robin joyously  
Reads my verses back to me.

Page by page to write a book,  
On a pleasant pasture brook,  
While an old wind-broken tree  
Tells his romances to me.

## THE BAKER

Some days I watch a baker bake,  
    White loaves upon the sky;  
At night, I see him mould and make  
    A creamy sugar pie.

Sometimes I see him mixing dough  
    To bake on afternoons.  
Some nights I see him slice the pie  
    In half and quarter moons.

## RAIN

The rain is a cruel warden  
    To douse the moon and stars  
And prison every window  
    With a hundred silver bars.

## PROLOGUE FOR A NEW ILLIAD

He stands,  
My bought bouquet of starved roses  
And carnations  
Busying his hands. . . .

His eyes,  
Blue as the hue  
Of the skies  
Hanging over Ithaca,  
Hold hints of Ulysses  
Scheming for life  
Against Circe  
And Polyphemus,  
Or planning a steed  
Of wood to lead  
Illium  
To her doom.

Only the Cyclops  
And the witch,  
And the roof tops  
Of old Troy  
Are all one of the shops  
Across the street from him and me:  
"The Italian-American Floral Company"

Ah, where are the myrmidons  
Of the invulnerable ones;  
The great spears of Ajax and the swords  
Of slashing Agammemnon's hordes;  
Athens' wise magnificence,  
Silent Sparta's stern pretense,  
The sacrifice of Icarus,  
The godly strut of Heracles,  
The loves and feasts Olympian. . . ?



All their heritage to men,  
All the witchery and dream,  
They still express  
Now concentrate  
In the hard gleam  
And hate  
Of business bitterness,

Glinting from the Aegean blue of his eyes,  
And hardening on the twisted cheek  
Of this noble Greek  
Of a florist who poses  
Half obsequious  
As I pay him for his paled carnations  
And three old roses. . . .

Nick Constantinopoulos. . . .

## HERE

Here in a world that runs riot  
For fool pots of gold,  
Where grace goes to them who can buy it,  
Where laughter is sold,  
Where love is a bartered flimsy. . . .  
I dream and grow old.

Here on a field under heaven,  
Where daisies lie flung,  
And spring yields for summer's leaven  
The wreaths she has strung,  
Where love is a sun-ravished blossom,  
I dream and grow young.

Here on a sea breathing slowly  
The spice of the skies,  
Where the wind's least whisper is holy  
And God hears no lies,  
Where the waves make song to the gale's mad meter,  
I dream and grow wise. . . .

## POET AND BROKER

Two broker men across the aisle  
Sit and talk of bonds and stocks.  
I sit across the aisle from them,  
And dream of stars and hollyhocks.

I sit and plan a gentle ode  
To gentle things like summer rain,  
To timid things like leaves at dawn,  
To gorgeous things like hills in Spain.

They chat of millions made and lost,  
Of U. S. Steel and Bethlehem.  
Great God, how dark their souls must be,  
God, how I pity them. . . !

They sit and talk of balances  
In sundry banks, and profits earned. . . .  
I wonder if the poems I mailed  
Will be accepted or returned.

They talk of millions lost and made,  
I dream of but a poet's fee.  
And if they knew how small that is,  
Great God, how they would pity me. . . ?

## INHERITANCE

I hate to grow old  
And be waited on  
For my last breath  
And my gold.

I want to be  
Remembered at least for a season  
By what I bear,  
Like any tree.

I will hate the throngs  
Who pity my clay,  
When I leave them in fee  
My dreams and my songs.



QUATRAINS  
*and*  
COUPLETS



## QUATRAINS FOR A BANK CASHIER

Enough that you must turn your days to discs  
Of jaundiced metal, telling one by one,  
For surer fortunes and for lesser risks,  
With all the tense devotion of a nun.

Enough to die with this, when knowing more:  
How flowers are golden with no weight of gold,  
And how beyond horizons lies a store  
Of treasure that no treasury can hold. . . .

## TO MOST WIVES OF BAD HUSBANDS

There is no virtue in your constancy,  
To pen your vagrant fancies in,  
And find a fireplace and a wheel to spin  
Dull cloth to cloak the sons of Romany.

## PHILOSOPHY

Let us agree then, that no end is met  
In life, and there no purpose lies,  
Save we are separate clockworks idly set,  
To run the measure of a blind surmise.



## A NEWLY PLOWED FIELD

Stand in reverence before this rough soil,  
Without tradition's dung of great deed;  
No magic but the hard touch of toil,  
No spell but scattered seed. . . .

## QUATRAIN

A love as true as steel,  
Will moulder out in rust. . . .  
Better ours, a candle  
Sputtering in a gust. . . .

## TO A MARCH WIND

Long before our day you drummed the sea,  
With battering tempos, and mad shrills,  
Flinging to God your blasphemies  
With pagan frenzy. On sad hills

You drooled your runes in a wild creed,  
Frightening the forests at their prayers.  
And turned the venerable oak into a reed  
To shriek your sacrilegious airs.

Long before we dreamed of days to be,  
Unloosed from bar and bolt,  
Before men sang or died for liberty,  
You were the virtuoso of revolt.

## ORIGINALITY

There is a fear the hills should know,  
However huge they are and high;  
That never can they find their tongues,  
Except to echo back a cry. . . .

They show no fear, and nor will I. . . .  
With their pretense, I make a loan,  
From an old treasury of dream,  
And claim the echoes for my own.

## COUPLETS OVER AN ALABAMA LYNCHING BEE

Sometimes, I think I'd rather own,  
Being roasted to the bone,

And with blistering flames efface  
My color kinship to your race.

Sometimes I think I'd rather be  
This black man fruited on a tree,

Broken, bruised and pocked with holes,  
Than own your lovely Christian souls.

Which one of you would ever boast,  
Of having played the Holy Ghost,

And dare confess for all your scorn,  
How each mulatto Christ is born. . . ?



WORDS FOR MUSIC



## WINTER SONG

I have tried to regather  
The charm of night,  
The night you gave warmth  
To the winds of December,  
But all I can leave to the years  
Is to write  
That I cannot forget  
What is sweet to remember.

Your lips are elusive,  
Your form slips away;  
No breath of my song  
Can give glow to the ember  
Of love that was ours, so  
All I can say  
Is—I will not forget  
What is sweet to remember. . . .

## RAIN SONG

If heaven weep forever,  
Shall I dare complain?  
What use have I for sunlight,  
Who met you in the rain. . . ?

The earth may turn to ocean;  
The deluge come again;  
What need have I for empire,  
Who kissed you in the rain. . . ?

## THAT NIGHT

One singing night, and yet no note is gone;  
Music still lingers on the ledge of dawn.

We were so strong together standing still,  
Drinking the moon wine on our trysting hill.

We are so strong together, standing still,  
Like two lithe saplings on a lonely hill,

Pointing our vision out against the skies,  
For flame to light the tinder in our eyes.

We are so strong together, dream entwined,  
Like two trees tied together by the wind.

## POET LOVE

Hosts of faces tensed to duty,  
Blind drawn, frosted windows,  
Dead to beauty.

I saw a world,  
On dull debasement centered,  
And only ashen grief,  
Until you entered.

Ah, rest a while, my own;  
You may be bringing,  
One deathless echo  
To my singing. . . .



## APRIL

Under the snow,  
We buried October's love ;  
Nothing but stone below,  
Nothing but cold above.

There it would lie,  
We both so sadly planned,  
Like a lost memory,  
Like a vanished land.

But now it lies,  
A cold naked shame  
To our frightened eyes,  
Since April came.

We should have known,  
Who have lived love so,  
To build tombs of stone,  
And not of snow. . . .

## DEAD LOVE

So airily you left me,  
Without a formal sigh,  
Without the usual pathos  
And tremor at good-bye.

I wish the world would leave me  
As easily, when I die.

## LOVE QUESTIONS

Let there be only  
Wonder in the night,  
When moon and star  
Mesh us in their spell. . . .  
We may be seen as fools  
In wise men's sight;  
Yet greater than wisdom  
Is to love too well. . . .

## OLD FLAME

You stained my mouth  
With garnet and with gold;  
You drenched my nights  
With fire. . . .

You were a witch  
Spelling transmutation  
Over mould,  
And brought forth  
Frenzy and desire. . . .

And then I learned  
How we were mechanisms  
Sprung with fears  
Unwinding to a trip  
And halting only when the gears  
Had turned  
A senseless round  
Of sane monotonies  
And years. . . .

## TO A CIRCE

Lash me as the tempest whips the seas,  
Burn me on your sacrificial fires,  
Be pitiless with me, if it may please,  
The strangest portion of your wierd desires. . .

But leave me as I am, and make no spell,  
Of ugly flattery and potioned wine.  
The love I bear you cannot breathe in hell,  
Or glow beneath the bristle of a swine. . . .

## SEA MOON

Last night the moon  
Rose up from the sea,  
A maiden blushing  
In her modesty. . . .

But came a ravisher. . . ?  
I saw not how nor whence,  
So soon she paled  
With her experience. . . .

## IN CAMELOT

In Camelot, it matters not,  
If one be rich or poor,  
Or old or young, or strange in tongue,  
So long as love endure. . . .

There is no shame, or sin or blame;  
The Magdelens are pure,  
For love is God in Camelot,  
And none are rich or poor. . . .

I know that I would find you there  
Upon a parapet,  
In girdled frock and sandals soft,  
And glistening coronet;

Nor would it matter if your hair  
Were golden or were jet;  
I know that I would find you there,  
Upon a parapet.

## ROMANZA

For joy's own sake, my lady,  
    Remain and help me sing. . . .  
I with my humble verses,  
    You with your luted string.

For you are lute and fingers,  
    And I am but the words.  
For I am one with mortals,  
    And you are of the birds.

Such song we would make together,  
    As men have never heard;  
Because you are the music,  
    And I am but the word.

## FLUTE SONG

With you I have no song,  
    With you I linger mute;  
I wish you were a witch,  
    To make of me a flute. . . .

With you I lose the lure,  
    Of distances and ships. . . .  
I only ask to be  
    A plaything for your lips.

## CAPRICE

Must it be so  
That men may not know  
Sweets till they miss them. . . ?  
Shall lips be less dear,  
In being too near  
To those who may kiss them. . . ?

Must love only rise,  
In far away eyes  
On the offing. . . ?  
While that which we may  
Abide with each day,  
Withers to scoffing. . . ?

Love it is sad,  
Bitterly mad  
And so tragic,  
That you cannot hold  
Immutable gold,  
For all your magic. . . .

## TEMPEST

I was fashioned like a tree,  
Where my fathers seeded me.

Now my trunk and limbs lie spread  
On an unaccustomed bed,

And my roots are out of sod,  
Making grimaces at God.

I was rooted like an oak,  
When a tempest swiftly broke ;

When your beauty put to rout  
All this strength, and tore me out. . . .

## ORIENTALE

You are a Persian song,  
Attar of roses  
And flowers without name. . . .

Your voice is the slippered silence  
Of the days  
That steal along blue ways,  
And end in flame. . . .

## SUMMER SONG

Like a smile, like a glance,  
    In your eyes, my sweet,  
Like a whirl in a dance  
    To a Bacchic beat,  
Like a whimsical turn in circumstance,  
    So summer is fleet.

September may find you  
    So loveless my sweet.  
And the tears that were dew  
    May be frozen to sleet. . . .  
Ah, what is a poor fearful lover to do,  
Since the hours of the summer are all too few,  
    Too rare, and too fleet. . . ?



## DAWN ON THE RIALTO

The portals to the cabaret are shut,  
And stilled the jazz, the rattle and the crash.  
But where the merchant guzzled with the slut,  
The owner sits and fondles with the cash.

The temple fades to drabness with the day;  
The seats keep grinning at the gaping shrine.  
It should be droll to know the ones who pay  
To scream with laughter at an empty line;  
As ever it remains that fools make gay  
With froth and bubble though they pay for wine.

## HUNKY MEETS A MAN

Say blokes, I just met a man,  
A lanky sort, with a bend  
From shoulders down  
Like a feller does giving things  
To kids.

He was different. Don't know why,  
But I felt to home with him.  
He had a line and a smile  
That lit me up inside  
With a hundred lights.

He said things, now low, now high,  
But every word of it was regular.

He had eyes just full of fellowship,  
Nothing like I ever see in my boss,  
Or even you guys calling yourselves  
True blue pals.

There was something warm and full-like  
About him, like you felt about your mother  
When you were a kid.

I once read a Salvation Army tract  
About a Man with who had a smile, a voice  
And eyes like him; and how He tried  
To save the world from sin and pain and such.  
I didn't fall for that stuff much.

But when I met this guy, all the old story  
Came like a flash to me; and I saw Him who  
Two thousand years ago, also had a bend  
In His back, just like a feller does  
Giving toys and candy to children,

And a voice and a smile that lit up  
The insides of men with suns and stars;

Everything he said sounded like the real goods,  
And all the poor, the down and outers  
And the folks with hearts, believed Him.

Only the higher-ups and grafters,  
Didn't like His dope, because He had it  
On them pretty.

They framed Him up, railroaded Him to jail  
And hanged Him on a cross.

Funny, someone told me that this buddy I met to-day;  
Also done his bit in the pen, just for saying  
All the things that Jesus said.

Hell, it's no disgrace going to jail any more,  
When they can put the likes of him there.

Did I get introduced? No sirree! He just  
Walks up and grabs my mitt, and with a voice  
That still sounds like a hundred golden harps  
In my ears,  
He says, "Glad to meet you, brother. My name is Gene,  
Gene Debs. . ."

















